

VIDEO

FAQ

Q Which is the best next-generation DVD format, Blu-ray or HD-DVD?

A Unfortunately, it's far too soon to tell which of these formats will become dominant in the long run. Blu-ray has the edge technologically, with higher storage capacities, but better technology doesn't always win out.

The format that can produce the right HD video content at the most competitive price should win the battle. At the moment, Blu-ray appears to have taken a very slight early lead in terms of content support, but HD-DVD discs may prove cheaper to manufacture.

The electronics industry will be keen to promote the new formats to the public, as profits will be considerable. However, everyone but home cinema enthusiasts should wait as long as possible before committing to one or the other. In the meantime, sit back and enjoy your DVDs.

Seth Barton

Notebooks and video expert

seth@computershopper.co.uk



KWORLD DVB-T 300U

★
£40 inc VAT

The biggest problem with PC TV tuners has often been the bundled software, which can be very poor. As digital TV broadcasts now include a free electronic programme guide (EPG), though, and CyberLink's PowerCinema provides a brilliant interface, we thought those days were long behind us. Sadly, Kworld had to prove us wrong with its DVB-T 300U USB TV tuner. It gets everything wrong and is one of the most difficult products we've ever had to use.

Things start off well enough. The tuner is reasonably compact and its black and silver colour scheme will match many PCs and notebooks, although we prefer the smaller USB stick designs. Setup is easy and quick; we simply plugged the device in and used the supplied disc. On launching the software application it offered a search function, which found all the expected channels and stored them.

Channels are listed in the common DVB-T order, with ITV1 first. This dates back to the origins of digital TV in the UK with the ITV-driven ONdigital brand. However, we couldn't find any easy way of rearranging the channels into the more popular order, with BBC1 first. The interface presents the channels in a list, so to scroll through them you have to use the down arrow, which is the opposite of how all TVs and set-top boxes function.

Pressing the EPG button in full-screen mode appears to do nothing. This is because the EPG window opens behind the TV viewing window. It's only an EPG in the loosest sense of the term. It presents a text list of the programs that are currently on in the multiplex of channels you're watching. It doesn't even provide basic now and next information, and you can't resize the window itself to show all the information

SUMMARY

- ✓ Cheap
- ✗ No proper EPG
- ✗ Channel list works in reverse

DIGITAL TV TUNER RF, IR, MPEG-2 capture format, USB2 interface. PART CODE DVB-T-USB
SUPPLIER www.scan.co.uk
DETAILS www.kworld.com.tw/uk



on offer. You certainly won't be able to use this to plan your viewing or schedule recordings.

Fortunately, the video quality is good. The picture doesn't suffer from compression artefacts other than the usual minor ones associated with digital TV. If you simply want to watch the occasional programme, this product could suffice. However, the Freecom DVB-T Stick reviewed in *What's New, Shopper* December 2005 is available for a similar price and has better software.

We reviewed the Hauppauge WinTV-HVR-900 in *What's New, Shopper* March 2006, which scored only

one star because of similar software problems. Digital TV hardware doesn't vary immensely these days, which means it's the software applications that make or break a product. Until Kworld improves its software, it will struggle to keep up with its competitors' products.

Seth Barton

Also consider...

TERRATEC Cinergy hybrid T USB XS

★★★★★
£79 inc VAT



Terratec's USB stick receives both analogue and digital TV broadcasts. It also has a breakout lead with a range of audio and video inputs.

It comes with the excellent PowerCinema 4 software. This gives you a Sky+ style fullscreen EPG, as well as media file and DVD playback. The remote is well designed and the buttons clearly labelled.

This tiny TV tuner has all the features you could ever want. Picture quality is good and the software is the best we've seen. You can buy cheaper USB TV sticks, but this is the best.

USB TV STICK RF, line in, composite and S-video inputs, MPEG2 capture format, USB Hi-Speed interface PART CODE E3318
SUPPLIER www.savastore.com 0871 666 1616 DETAILS www.terratec.net ✓ Receives digital and analogue TV ✗ Not the cheapest available FULL REVIEW Dec 2005

PANASONIC NV-GS17B

★★★★★
£199 inc VAT



£ Panasonic's NV-GS17B was the

cheapest camcorder in our recent Labs

(*Shopper* April 2006). Despite this it produced some very respectable video in our tests. It captured decent detail and realistic colour, all without excessive noise. A big 24x optical zoom is handy for distant subjects, but it lacks a light to record in low light.

The menu system is easy to use with the small joystick. There's an S-video output, so you can play back video on your TV. At this price it's a real bargain, and a great first camera.

MINIDV CAMERA 24x optical zoom, 0.8-megapixel CCD, 2.5" LCD screen, FireWire and USB interfaces, weight 410g, battery life 106 minutes PART CODE NV-GS17B SUPPLIER www.argos.co.uk DETAILS www.panasonic.co.uk ✓ Great video quality for the price ✗ No FireWire or video inputs FULL REVIEW Apr 2006

NEUROS MPEG4 Video Recorder

★★

£150 inc VAT

Despite the fact that lots of big companies such as Apple, Sony and Microsoft have got in on the portable video player market, there hasn't been a huge uptake of the products. Part of the problem, as we've discovered from reviewing these devices, is getting video on to them.

Neuros's MPEG4 Video Recorder has been designed specifically to solve this problem, by recording analogue video directly into a format that your portable media player supports. If nothing else, it cuts down on all that time-consuming recoding.

The MPEG4 Video Recorder is best used by PlayStation Portable (PSP) owners, as it supports the Memory Stick card format. It captures composite video, encodes it to MPEG4 and stores it directly to the Memory Stick. Simply plug the Memory Stick into your PSP and play the MPEG4 file. Video quality is acceptable, although it's not as good as video from Sony's own UMD movie discs. However, it's good enough for watching your favourite TV programmes.

You can select a number of resolutions, including widescreen 368x208, which is the most suitable option for the PSP.

An hour of TV at this resolution amounted to 376MB of video, though, so you'll need a 1GB Memory Stick if you want to watch an entire movie.

The only other card type the Video Recorder supports is CompactFlash, which limits its usefulness to owners of other devices. We'd have liked



to see support for the more common SD and MMC formats in the same unit. Unfortunately, this device has no USB output either, so you can't transfer the files to a PC without a memory card and compatible reader.

Connecting the device to your chosen video source can be a hassle. It has no tuner, so you'll need to connect a DVD player or Freeview box to the provided SCART adaptor. The Video Recorder also has a composite video output, which you must connect to your TV to see what you're doing.

The video output lets you see the simple but ugly menu system, which you control using the supplied mini remote control. There are no controls on the device itself, however, so losing the remote would be bad news. You can schedule recordings through the menu, but you'll have to leave your Freeview box running on the correct channel.

If you want a simple way to record video to a Memory Stick, the Neuros does the job. However, it is expensive, and connecting the leads every time is a chore. The end results are very pleasing, but only real TV addicts will be able to justify the high price.

Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Records to Memory Stick
- ✗ Expensive
- ✗ Supports MS and CF cards only

CAPTURE DEVICE Composite input and output, phono input and output, MPEG4 capture format, MS and CF storage formats.
PART CODE 4030200
SUPPLIER www.sendit.com
DETAILS www.neurosaudio.com

CHOOSING A... DV Camera

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

CCD: 400,000 pixels
ZOOM: 10x optical/300x digital
VIDEO PORTS: FireWire out, S-video out
MONITORING: Mono viewfinder, 2.5" colour LCD
MEDIA: MiniDV tape
STILLS CAPTURE: 640x480 to tape
EXTRAS: Remote control
Recommended minimum in grey

1 If you just want to make home movies, a £200 digital video (DV) camera with the specs shown above will be fine. A range of auto-exposure modes will ensure you get decent results in all conditions. The LCD screen provides easy playback on location, while the remote control allows for comfortable viewing on the sofa. If you'll be using the zoom a lot, concentrate on the optical zoom specification. Check the battery life, which should preferably be 90 minutes or more, and consider budgeting for an extra battery.

2 To edit video, get a model that provides DV-in. You can transfer edited footage back to MiniDV tape and run off VHS copies through the camera's S-video out. Cameras with S-video in can often be used to capture analogue video.

3 Enthusiasts will pay extra for a more flexible camera. Good manual focus and a colour viewfinder make for better camerawork, an external microphone transforms your audio and good battery and charger options keep you filming for longer. A high-resolution CCD might improve video quality, but while this and a flash memory slot will make your DV camera double as a digital camera, quality will be basic. For the best-quality video, look for a model with three CCDs. This gives more realistic colour reproduction and reduces picture noise to a minimum.

4 Miniature DV cameras, especially those that use tiny MicroMV tapes or memory cards, may tempt gadget-lovers, but picture quality could be compromised. Cameras that replace tape with a hard disk are more useful, making your footage more manageable.

5 If you're serious about film-making, £1,500 buys you a DV camera with superb optics, three CCDs and the requisite connectors to attach equally expensive professional AV accessories. High Definition camcorders are now available, and are worth considering if you have an HDTV.

PANASONIC NV-GS150EB

★★★★★

£464 inc VAT



Panasonic's
NV-GS150EB
won our DV



camera test in *Shopper* April 2006 with its high-quality video and low price. Three CCDs capture highly detailed video with very realistic colours. Picture noise is minimal, and it has a widescreen mode. There is no light for shooting in the dark, though.

The cylindrical body is comfortable to hold and looks good. The menu is easy to navigate and the other controls are well positioned. The battery lasts an amazing two hours. This excellent DV camera will suit most users.

MINIDV CAMERA 10x optical zoom, 3x 0.8-megapixel CCDs, 2.5" LCD screen, FireWire and USB interfaces, weight 420g, battery life 133 minutes **PART CODE** NV-GS150EB **SUPPLIER** www.pixmania.co.uk **DETAILS** www.panasonic.co.uk Three CCDs at a low price No image stabilisation in widescreen mode **FULL REVIEW** Apr 2006

PINNACLE ShowCenter 200

★★★★★

£141 inc VAT



The ShowCenter 200 streams media files from your PC to your living room using Microsoft's Windows Media Connect. It supports all the most common photo, audio and video file types and is easy to install. Its wired and wireless connections mean it'll fit into any home network. Best media player on the market.



STREAMING MEDIA PLAYER Requires 1.5GHz PC with Windows XP SP1 and 256MB RAM; SCART, component, composite and S-video outputs, two stereo phono, optical and coaxial S/PDIF audio outputs, USB, 100Mbit/s network, wireless 802.11g **SUPPLIER** www.dabs.com **DETAILS** www.dabs.com Wide file support Clunky interface **FULL REVIEW** Dec 2005